3:Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
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never by choice made an offensive attack in the dark; they never raided when the moon was a crescent with the horns pointing upward, for the moon was then "full and running over" and there was the likelihood of rain, after which their trails could be easily traced on the moist earth.[12] They struck swiftly on moonlight nights or surprised undefended, isolated settlers by day when circumstances were favorable, killing or capturing their victims and driving their stolen animals back to their rendezvous, where they were attended until such time as they could return to the main camp. When approaching the camp or settlement, the warriors separated and entered it by pairs or small groups. If an enemy dog barked, the raiders tossed it a piece of meat to quiet it. The older, experienced men cut loose the more valuable horses and led them out, while the younger men gathered up the loose animals. At times it was understood that the horses taken by each man were to be his own; at other times, they were common property to be divided by the leader of the expedition. By means of signals, the raiders kept in touch with one another and would reunite when they had completed their foray or when considerations of safety demanded.

Frequently, of course, the Comanches engaged an enemy prepared to offer resistance. One simple strategy was to send forward a small party on swift horses to lead the enemy into an ambuscade. Sometimes this plan was successful, but often those hidden in ambush were unable to restrain their eagerness and rushed out too soon, causing the stratagem to fail. Although the leader planned the attack, when the battle began each man was free to fight according to the dictates of his own medicine and his personal inclinations.

As a rule the Comanches relied upon surprise, upon the effect of a sudden and furious dash, accompanied by an unearthly, blood-curdling war whoop. They avoided a pitched battle when they were matched by an equal or greater number. They preferred to surprise a much smaller party. If the enemy was not surprised or put to flight at once but stood his ground, the wedge-shaped mass of Comanches quickly assumed battle formation. The wedge turned into the shape of a huge ring or wheel without hub or spokes, whose rim consisted

[12] Julia Estill, "Indian Pictographs near Lange's Mill, Gillespie County, Texas," Texas Folklore Society *Publications*, IV, 105.

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725 of one or more distinct lines of warriors. This ring, winding around and around with machinelike regularity and precision approached nearer and nearer the enemy with each revolution. As a warrior approached the point on the circle nearest the enemy, he dropped into the loop around his horse's neck on the side opposite his target and discharged his arrows from beneath the neck of his horse while traveling at full speed. If his horse was shot down, he generally hit the ground on his feet, and holding his shield in front of him for protection, he shot from beneath it. Such strategy not only provided a difficult target for the enemy, but it gave the Comanches opportunity to reload while riding the circle safely out of danger of enemy fire.

One purpose of the Indian was to draw the fire of the enemy prematurely, and then to charge him while he was reloading. In this type of attack the bow proved not inferior to the musket. For a time the Comanches were eager to get muskets, but their inferiority for this mode of warfare was soon recognized. Muskets had greater range, but a much slower rate of fire, were difficult to load on horseback, and required ammunition which could not always be obtained.[13] Not until the whites adopted the use of the revolver were they able to cope successfully with this type of Indian strategy.

The Comanches never received a charge and rarely met one. If charged, the line immediately in front of the charge broke and melted away, reforming on either flank of the enemy to continue the attack or break again when charged. In one battle with a superior force of Utes the Comanches let the Utes chase them fifty or sixty miles, engaging and disengaging themselves while they traded ground for freedom of action. Occasionally a young warrior, anxious to display his bravery and gain prestige, might leave the line and dash dangerously close to the enemy. The attack might continue until the ponies gave out or the enemy fire became too hot, when they withdrew to attempt another surprise.

Naturally, when the attack occurred on rough terrain or where there was timber, brush, rocks, or holes, the strategy had to be altered. A common procedure in such a position was to leave part of the horses at a safe distance and then approach the enemy with two riders to a horse. While circling the crucial spot, the extra warriors slipped

[13] Linton, "Acculturation and Process of Culture Change," *loc. cit.*, 474.

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off the horses, if possible unnoticed by the enemy, whose attention was distracted at the time. While the riders continued to draw the attention of the enemy, the dismounted warriors slipped silently to a position from which they could strike a mortal blow.[14] Another plan of strategy was to take up a position in a creek valley where there was a thicket of bushes and stunted trees and where the low, steep banks of a meandering stream afforded a measure of protection. In such a place their concealment was so complete that it would have been difficult to believe any Indians were there had it not been for the twang of a bowstring or the swish of an arrow. In such a position they were known to have fought without giving or asking quarter until there was not one left to bend a bow.

When a comrade was killed or wounded, the Comanches endeavored to retrieve his body or carry him to safety if he were still living. Two Indians riding abreast, one on each side of the prostrate warrior, would reach down and take hold of the warrior as they passed, either dragging him to safety or swinging him up beside one of them. If he could not be removed by mounted comrades, he was sometimes lassoed and dragged to a spot where he could be recovered.

To the white man the Comanche appeared to be a cruel, savage warrior. But in all fairness it must be remembered that he knew nothing of the white man's code of war and his so-called humanity. He could not take many prisoners for the simple reason that he had no prison to hold them and perhaps no food to sustain them. He killed the men, took the women when he could, and adopted into the tribe children who were too young to run away. His courage was superb. Since he gave no quarter, he asked none in return. Sometimes, when the fight became desperate, a warrior dismounted and took off his moccasins in token of his resolve never to retreat.[15] Even when surrounded, with no hope of escape, he always refused to surrender and fought as long as any strength remained in his body.

Although it was not their custom to torture unfortunate enemies, at times when the Comanches became unusually angered, they resorted to extreme forms of barbarism in seeking revenge. For the most part, the treatment an individual captive received depended on

[14] R. I. Dodge, *The Plains of the Great West*, 380, 381.
[15] Informant: Face Wrinkling Like Getting Old.